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On occasion when supplies are plentiful the Bedouin eat copiously, because the time and scale of the next meal may be uncertain. In general, the standard of nutrition of the Badawin is low—in the opinion of some, below the level necessary in other regions to sustain life. As a result, the Badawin are small, even stunted, and lightly built, though their physical powers and endurance are great. Life is, however, very hard; and by forty, particularly in the case of women, old age has begun. Fifty years is a long life for a nomad.

One means of supplementing the deficiencies in arid areas is by raiding. Amongst Badawin the *ghazw* (*razzia* or *rezzou*) is a recognised activity amounting almost to sport, but it also fulfils a definite economic function. The effects of a bad season are mitigated, as when rains have failed in the desert, the Bedu has a choice of taking what he requires by force from other people, or of starving. The word 'sport' has been used, because although fundamentally a serious matter, Badawin raids are conducted under certain conventions—almost, one might say, rules.[1] Rapid, unlooked-for coups, using cunning and guile, are most favoured: bloodshed is as far as possible avoided, though goods, womenfolk, and children become the property of the victors under a kind of slavery. Successful leadership in tribal raids is the means by which personal reputation and power is built up: King Ibn Saud, originally a dispossessed desert nomad, has gained absolute power in Arabia through successful tribal encounters on an increasingly large scale. Badawin raids may be directed against other tribes, but frequently, toll is levied on agricultural settlements on the fringe of the desert. Less able to resist, and with more at stake than the nomad, settled cultivators sometimes remain under permanent tribute to Badawin tribes, and supply a quantity of needed foodstuffs to their overlords. The name *khawa* (tribute of friendship) is applied to such transactions. Raiding is now declining, because of increasing control by local governments, but in addition to the political problem presented in controlling outbreaks, there is the economic factor of providing alternative occupation to ensure a livelihood.[2] Though declining, the practice is still not extinct. For as recently as 1946, J. C. Crowfoot could write, 'Arabs are now raiding each other in Fords and Chevrolets'.

[1] There are only three sources of amusement or distraction in Badawin life: conversation round a coffee hearth, family life, and raiding.

[2] Cf. the decline in population of the Barbary coastlands since the suppression of piracy in the Mediterranean. There, precisely the same economic factor was involved.